

GOD AND THE ESSENCE OF LIBERTY :

A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY INTO THE HISTORY OF FREEDOM

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It's a great honor indeed to be here. First of all, I would like to thank Professor Ellis Sandoz for his extraordinary kindness. Without his help and his invitation, I would probably never have been here. I also want to thank Ellis for putting me in contact with Mr Daniel Hsu (Zhiyue Xu) of Shanghai 's Fudan University . Without Daniel's visit to Beijing exactly one year ago, I would probably never have found the church about which I will tell you in a moment. I am very sorry Daniel can't make it this year. But he promised that he would come to Boston next year with some other Chinese translators of Eric Voegelin. By virtue of their industry, Voegelin has formally entered China . Just a little more than a couple of months ago, the Chinese version of both *Modernity Without Restraint* and *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin* was published by Shanghai's East China Normal University Press. 1 [1] In the history of freedom, it's no small step. And again, I thank Ellis for introducing me to Mr Barret Dolph and Professor James Rhodes and all other friends who attend the meeting. I met James in April when he gave lectures during his month-long visit to Peking University . I'm very delighted to see all of you here!

I'm also very happy to see Professor John Danford. It's John's *Roots of Freedom* that I chose for translation more than three years ago as the starting point for exploring the history of liberty. The Chinese version of both *Roots of Freedom* and Professor Orlando Patterson's *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* is expected to be published in the coming months by The Commercial Press, China 's leading academic publishing house.

Thanks to the Internet, I've been able to contact hundreds of scholars in America and Europe and Asia about the history of freedom since August 2005, a little over a month before I formally quit my job at China 's state broadcaster China Central Television for starting up the liberty project. It was during the course of this inquiry that I got to know Ellis, Daniel, John, Barret, James and many other friends. There are political philosophers, historians, theologians, legal experts, journalists, economists and even natural scientists, some of whom are Nobel laureates.2 [2] Not

1 [1] See the webpage of East China Normal University Press: <http://www.chinese-thought.org/xstj/003904.htm>; <http://www.chinese-thought.org/xstj/004043.htm>

only did they send me their thoughts by hundreds of emails, they sent me scores of books and articles. I've really learned a lot from them and I'm so grateful to them.

Then the question is, what on earth have I found so far?

There are certainly many important things concerning the specific aspects of liberty. Two years are no doubt far too short for me to figure out all these points. But for now, the single most

Apart from the experts I mentioned elsewhere in the paper, I've also especially benefited from emails and discussions with Harold Berman, Martin Ostwald, Rodney Stark, Richard John Neuhaus, Richard Pipes, Anthony J. Blasi, Vincent Ostrom, Quentin Skinner, Otto Vervaart, G. R. Evans, Yuan Tseh Lee, late Yang Xiaokai, James M. Buchanan, Kenneth J. Arrow, Yuri Pines, Charles Fornara, David Aikman, Robert Metcalf, Charlene L. Fu, Geoffrey Lloyd, Katharine Simms, Oscar Handlin, George Kateb, George McLean, Hu Yeping, Fenggang Yang, Wenyu Xie, Larry Iannaccone, Nathan Tarcov, Bruce Lincoln, Li Meng, Wolfgang P. Moller, Joerg Moller, Michael Zank, Daniel Bell, Lee Ward, Mark Henrie, John Vella, Alan Boegehold, Hui Xie, Michael Gagarin, Edward Harris, Peter Landau, John A Eidsmoe, I.H.Palmier, James R. Stoner, Stephen B.Presser, Herwig Wolfram, Rachel Fulton, Michael A. Gillespie, Christopher Cullen, David Hart, Ben Sikma, Jon Roland, Eric Foner, Josiah Ober, Claudio Katz, W.V. Harris, Donald Kagan, Leonard Liggio, Philip Pettit, Glen W. Bowersock, Paul H. Rubin, Robert E Somerville, Leila Choukroune, Randy Peerenboom, Eugenio F Biagini, Raphael Sealey, Neil MacCormick, Brian Tamanaha, Margaret M. Mitchell, Robert Munro, Rocco Pezzimenti, Malcolm Schofield, Peter Linehan, Linda Woodhead, Shadia Drury, Robert Dahl, Bertell Ollman, W. Wesley McDonald, Eric W. Robinson, Jeff Hart, Andrew Lintott, Julia Crick, Constantin Fasolt, Ian Moxon, P. J. Rhodes, Fergus Millar, Martial Staub, Ramsay MacMullen, John A. Taylor, Blaise Nagy, Richard Kaeuper, Bruce H. Mann, Tony Judt, Anthony Reid, Edward Friedman, Richard Seaford, Lisi Oliver, Chris Bellitto, Timothy D. Barnes, Lester L. Field, Jr., Richard J. Ross, Stephen Morillo, Kanishka Jayasuriya, William Aird, Paul Gottfried, Laurence Claus, Arend Lijphart, Uta-Renate Blumenthal, Shadi Bartsch, William Scheuerman, J.M.Hobson, Tom Bethell, Graeme Lang, Walter Prevenier, David Schaberg, Robert D. Putnam, Charles Tilly, Jules Lobel, Bernard S. Jackson, Lamin.Sanneh, Mario Liverani, Jeff Goldsworthy, Joseph Blenkinsopp, Shaye Cohen, Randy E. Barnett, Roger Trigg, Tibor Machan, Thomas Pangle, Richard Elliott Friedman, Adam J. Kosto, L. W. Hurtado, Robert Parker, Moulakis Athanasios, Robert Swanson, Joseph Levine, Carlo Ginzburg, R.C. van Caenegem, Binkley Woods, Michael Cook, John Jirik, Peng Dingding, Zhang Heng, Yang Shuang, Li Shushan, Zheng Ye, Su Lezhou, Wang Xiqing, Liu Jiaruo, Huang Peijian, Shi Yan, Li Juan, Li Guifeng, Zeng Zhuokun, Zhang Weiliang, my family members, and the people I interviewed during my stint at Asian Business Leaders magazine, including Paul Kennedy, Shashi Tharoor, Deepak Lal, Jonathan Anderson, Wang Gungwu, Choyun Hsu, Michael Backman, Ezra F. Vogel, Chenggang Xu, Alan Macfarlane, Daniel Franklin, and Joseph S. Nye. Jr.

important thing I would like to share with you here is this. The faith in God as the Lord is the beginning of freedom.

When I began my project, the main question I asked is how and why freedom both as a value and as an institution figured prominently only in the Western society and even now still largely remains confined to this part of the world? The motive for this query is simple. I was very much curious and eager to know the elements that might have led to the institutionalization of liberty in the West with the hope that similar conditions would be established in China and elsewhere in the world.

The more I knew about the growth of freedom in the West, the more I was captivated by the role of the faith in God as the Lord in the making of a free and responsible civilization. There may have been various reasons why liberty largely failed in the non-Western world. For me, a major reason for the stillbirth of freedom in the non-Western societies is that the bedrock for the building of liberty was missing in these cultures. That is, the faith in God as the Lord did not become the vital part of the non-Western consciousness. One cannot say that individuals in those parts of the world did not want freedom. Yet in societies like China with which I'm most familiar, freedom could not stand a realistic chance of becoming a positive value or a viable institution in much of their history because the rule by men instead of the rule of law was the constant pattern. For them, law was virtually the will of men in power so that it's meaningless to call for the rule of law. Without the faith in God as the Lord, freedom with the popular (mis)conception of doing anything one wants could only be perceived by anyone in power as a threat to the established order. However for societies where the faith in God as the Lord figures prominently, law is independent of the will of humans. It's the will of God, the Lord. The only truly right thing one can do is to do the divine will. As Ronald Reagan once put it, "the freedom to choose a Godly path is the essence of liberty. ♦3 [3] For me, that freedom could basically survive in the West is not by accident, nor mainly by the Western individuals' extraordinarily persistent struggle for liberty, but by their prominent obedience to the will of God compared to the rest of the world. And may I put it in another way: a free West is simply a by-product of its continued faith in God as the Lord in spite of the rise and fall of various forms of idolatry.

Then, how and why was there such exceptional obedience to God in the West? What is the will of God? What is God like? And, does God exist at all?

3 [3] Ronald Reagan, *Proclamation 4826 National Day of Prayer, 1981, March 19, 1981*, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/31981b.htm>

I'm not sure if I've got the answers to all these questions. I will present them to you as clearly as I can. But before that, let me make it clear that the exploration into these questions has brought me more than insight into the historical facts of how freedom grew in the West. Perhaps far more importantly, it also has brought me insight into "the ultimate questions of human existence" [4] including those of my existence. For the first time in my life, I began to become clearly conscious of the existence of God and of his personal relationship with me. This, to me, is the most important landmark in my life since I was born 31 years ago. Without it, my understanding of freedom would never be like what I'm sharing with you now. What exactly begot this "leap of being"? [5]

4 [4] On the relationship between freedom and truth, see John 8:31-47, especially 31-32, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,'" and Professor John W. Danford's analysis in his *Roots of Freedom: A Primer on Modern Liberty*, (ISI Books, 2000), especially Chapter 2, also Professor Sandoz's insight: "In a time when liberal democracy appears to be the only practicable alternative to authoritarianism or worse, it is precisely requisite that the ultimate questions of human existence be explored and, so far as possible, that the truth of reality be recovered as a living possession. Only thus can it be woven into the fabric of representative free government as the texture of political order, civic consciousness, and institutionalized statecraft in service of the good life. This, it appears to me at least, is the world-historic task of an authentic politics of truth if a plunge into the abyss is to be avoided." Ellis Sandoz, *The Politics of Truth and Other Ultimately Essay*, (University of Missouri Press, 1999), 42.

5 [5] "The leap in being, the experience of divine being as world-transcendent, is inseparable from the understanding of man as human. The personal soul as the sensorium of transcendence must develop parallel with the understanding of a transcendent God. Now, wherever the leap in being occurs experientially, the articulation of the experience has to grapple with the mystery of death and immortality. Men are mortal; and what is immortal is divine. This holds true for both Greeks and Israelites." in Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 235, and Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelin Revolution: A Biographical Introduction*, (Transaction Publishers, 2000), 117. "The term *leap in being*, though not invented by Voegelin, is given new amplitude. It is taken from Kierkegaard, and he was indebted to Hegel for the expression".

Well, I was deeply impressed by law, truth and transcendent being in both politics and philosophy of ancient Greeks. 6 [6] But there's a much bigger factor: Christianity.7 [7] In

6 [6] Two instances regarding the idea of divine being and the rule of law in ancient Greece may be worth mentioned here. Apart from Sophocles' *Antigone*, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, during my reading of the Hellenic history, I found these earlier passages being repeatedly quoted in the works devoted to Greek politics and philosophy. One is the words of Athena from Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.

*O men of Athens, ye who first do judge
The law of bloodshed, hear me now ordain.
Here to all time for Aegeus' Attic host
Shall stand this council-court of judges sworn,
Here the tribunal, set on Ares' Hill
Where camped of old the tented Amazons,
What time in hate of Theseus they assailed
Athens, and set against her citadel
A counterwork of new sky-pointing towers,
And there to Ares held their sacrifice,
Where now the rock hath name, even Ares' Hill.
And hence shall Reverence and her kinsman Fear
Pass to each free man's heart, by day and night
Enjoining, Thou shalt do no unjust thing,
So long as law stands as it stood of old
Unmarred by civic change. Look you, the spring
Is pure; but foul it once with influx vile
And muddy clay, and none can drink thereof.
Therefore, O citizens, I bid ye bow
In awe to this command, Let no man live,
Uncurbed by law nor curbed by tyranny;
Nor banish ye the monarchy of Awe
Beyond the walls; untouched by fear divine,
No man doth justice in the world of men.
Therefore in purity and holy dread
Stand and revere; so shall ye have and hold
A saving bulwark of the state and land,
Such as no man hath ever elsewhere known,
Nor in far Scythia, nor in Pelops' realm.
Thus I ordain it now, a council-court
Pure and unsullied by the lust of gain,
Sacred and swift to vengeance, wakeful ever
To champion men who sleep, the country's guard.
Thus have I spoken, thus to mine own clan
Commended it for ever. Ye who judge,*

*Arise, take each his vote, mete out the right,
Your oath revering. Lo, my word is said.*

The other originates from Demaratus' reply to Xerxes in Herodotus' *Histories*.

But, if need appeared, or if there were any great cause urging me on, I would contend with right good will against one of those persons who boast themselves a match for any three Greeks. So likewise the Lacedaemonians, when they fight singly, are as good men as any in the world, and when they fight in a body, are the bravest of all. For though they be free-men, they are not in all respects free; Law is the master whom they own; and this master they fear more than thy subjects fear thee. Whatever he commands they do; and his commandment is always the same: it forbids them to flee in battle, whatever the number of their foes, and requires them to stand firm, and either to conquer or die.

7 [7] See Voegelin's highly illuminating differentiation between "cosmological truth" (represented by the early empires), "anthropological truth" (appearing in the political culture of Athens and specifically in tragedy), and "soteriological truth" (appearing with Christianity), especially, "The impossibility of *philia* [love, especially in the sense of friendship. Also used by Voegelin to refer to noetic love of God. From Glossary of Terms in Volume 34 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, University of Missouri Press, 2006] between God and man may be considered typical for the whole range of anthropological truth. The experiences that were explicated into a theory of man by the mystic philosophers had in common the accent on the human side of the orientation of the soul toward divinity. The soul orients itself toward a God who rests in his immovable transcendence; it reaches out toward divine reality, but it does not meet an answering movement from beyond. The Christian bending of God in grace toward the soul does not come within the range of these experiences though, to be sure, in reading Plato one has the feeling of moving continuously on the verge of a breakthrough into this new dimension. The experience of mutuality in the relation with God, of the *amicitia* [Friendship. Used by Aquinas to refer to the possibility of mutual love between God and human beings. From Glossary of Terms] in the Thomistic sense, of the grace that imposes a supernatural form on the nature of man, is the specific difference of Christian truth. The revelation of this grace in history, through the incarnation of the Logos in Christ, intelligibly fulfilled the adventitious movement of the spirit in the mystic philosophers. The critical authority over the older truth of society that the soul had gained through its opening and its orientation toward the unseen measure was now confirmed through the revelation of the measure itself. In speaking in such terms about the experiences of the mystic philosophers and their fulfillment through Christianity, an assumption concerning history is implied that must be explicated. It is the assumption that the substance of history consists in the experiences in which man gains the understanding of his humanity and together with it the understanding of its limits. Philosophy and Christianity have endowed man

retrospect, it is the most important phenomenon I have encountered since the beginning of my liberty project. To me, it's Christianity that mainly has kept the West's obedience to God for much of the past two thousand years.

For quite a while, I was amazed how and why an originally obscure Jesus movement with the Jewish background in the Middle East came to grow into such a worldwide phenomenon that shaped the heart and mind of the globe's most influential civilization in recent centuries. I read some works that try to give reasonable explanation. And I also began to read the Holy Bible in a more serious way than before.

The question did not become somewhat easy to answer until I was baptized late last year at a house church in Beijing . Before that, I had already known from the works on Western history the role of biblical faith and the Christian church in the making of freedom such as absolute truth, human dignity, moral values, the rule of law and separation of powers. But the house church Daniel helped me find in early September last year gave me the first taste of it in the social reality in which I live. Previously either in Beijing or in my hometown, I had gone to some government-sanctioned churches since I was a high-school student. My mother has begun believing in Christianity and often gone to church since 1985 though never got baptized. The high school I attended is an ex-Catholic church school where the church remains the largest in the region today. I liked both the style of the church architecture and its solemn atmosphere. Yet I did not go there very often partly because of the heavy burden of my school study - I never was a bright student ♦ and partly because I did not think the church would necessarily have anything to do with the true God. It remained so after I went to college in Beijing where I spent much of the five-year undergraduate life reading what I'd like to read with politics, philosophy, and sociology topping the agenda. A major question I began to ask then is whether what I hold dearest such as truth and love and righteousness will turn out to be meaningless to me after I die. In other words, I wanted to pursue something eternally good but did not know yet how it was eternal and what its place was in the universe. It's part of a larger question I asked myself about

with the stature that enables him, with historical effectiveness, to play the role of rational contemplator and pragmatic master of a nature that has lost its demonic terrors. With equal historical effectiveness, however, limits were placed on human grandeur; for Christianity has concentrated demonism into the permanent danger of a fall from the spirit ♦ that is man's only by the grace of God ♦ into the autonomy of his own self, from the *amor Dei* [Love of God (Augustine)]; openness of the soul toward transcendence. From Glossary of Terms] into the *amor sui* [Love of the egoistically conceived self; closedness of the soul against transcendence. From Glossary of Terms]. The insight that man in his mere humanity, without the *fides caritate formata*, is demonic nothingness has been brought by Christianity to the ultimate border of clarity that by tradition is called revelation. ♦ in *The New Science of Politics*, Volume 5 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, 150-151. See also Wenyu Xie, *The Concept of Freedom: The Platonic-Augustinian-Lutheran-Kierkegaardian Tradition*, (University Press of America, 2003).

the ultimate meaning of life and the world. In the third year at college, I started to become interested in the history of freedom in the West, especially after getting to know Chen Guiwen, then a boss of a small bookstore near the campus. I learned a lot from numerous discussions with him. Chen never went to college but when I first met him in his bookshop, he had pondered for years over the role of liberty in the making of Western civilization.⁸ [8] And I also came upon the books by Dr Liu Xiaofeng, now professor at China's southern Sun Yat-sen University. It turned out that Dr Liu was a friend of Daniel's, one of the Chinese scholars who first suggested the Chinese translation of Eric Voegelin and the editor of the Chinese edition of *Modernity Without Restraint*. Against the backdrop of still widespread atheism and China's continued introduction of Western secular values, Dr Liu's books on the Christian faiths especially those of modern Russian and German philosophers and theologians served as a stimulus to both my college study regarding the roots of Western civilization and my personal quest for the ultimate meaning of life and the world. From then on, my general feelings about life and the world have begun to evolve into a belief that it's God our Creator that makes truth and love and righteousness eternal and that God is truth and love and righteousness. Later on, there's a growing belief in my mind that the most important thing one should do before one dies is to do God's will. Yet as for what is the will of God exactly and in detail, up to then I still did not believe the Holy Bible was the answer. At that time, God remained aloof from me, or rather, I remained aloof from him, though my belief was stronger than ever that he did exist and that he was righteous. I gather such a situation was not mine alone. Many people in many societies might have been like this. You can't say the idea of God or the faith in God is absolutely absent from their consciousness. Yet in this case it seems God is elusive and the faith in God might be a personal matter at best or virtually distinct at worst: hence impossible for the faith in God to figure prominently in the social consciousness, let alone for the society's obedience to the divine will to take hold.

As I went on with the study of Western history, I found what made it genuinely different was mainly its adoption of the Holy Bible as its foundation of worldview. For many people in the Western world over the past two thousand years, the Holy Bible, as Paul says in his second epistle to Timothy, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."⁹ [9] But how and why did this adoption happen? On the surface, it's incredible that people in the Roman and Hellenistic world and later those of Europe were converted to biblical faith that culturally came from the alien Mesopotamia and Palestine. For many people in today's China, Christianity is still an alien religion. As my quest went on, though, I found that the Bible itself, the New Testament more directly, revealed why this would

⁸ [8] It was during this period of time that I came to know and became seriously interested in such subjects and personalities as Hellenic freedom, Roman liberty, Englishmen's tradition of "ancient freedom," Magna Carta, John Locke, Montesquieu, David Hume, Adam Smith, America's founding, Alexis de Tocqueville, Lord Acton and Friedrich von Hayek.

⁹ [9] 2 Timothy 3:16

happen. The Gospel According to John: "the Word was God¹⁰ and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us¹⁰ For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.¹⁰ 10 [10] The Gospel According to Matthew: "Jesus came to them (his eleven disciples) and said, ¹¹All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'¹¹ 11 [11] In short, it's God himself who made it happen.¹² [12] Humans' part was just whether to do God's will or not.¹³ [13]

For unbelievers, all this would sound unbelievable. But the centuries that ensued indicate that ever more men and women became the followers of Jesus and many of them did try to do what Jesus told his disciples to do. The Acts of the Apostles is the beginning of the dramatic conversion to Christianity of the Roman and Hellenistic world and later of Europe , which became the global center of Christianity with generations of Europeans traveling to other continents to spread their faith mainly by establishing churches and schools and hospitals. I was very much impressed by what the apostles had done, especially Peter and Paul. I could not imagine what the fisherman of Galilee and the Pharisee who once persecuted Christians would do to spend the rest of their lives if Jesus did not come to them and if Jesus was not Christ? For me who did not know what God was really like and often felt God was distant, both the Old and New Testaments are quite the eye-opener that shows how God communicated with his people. To believe them to be true, though, never came easy. I was especially annoyed with the passages of animal sacrifice and tribal bloodshed in the Old Testament. For quite a while, the Bible reading was on-again, off-again. Despite this, I very much appreciated the themes of both testaments: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge¹⁴, 14 [14] "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man¹⁵,15 [15] "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on

10 [10] John 1:1-14, 3:16

11 [11] Matthew 28:18-20

12 [12] 2 Corinthians 3:6-9

13 [13] The rise of Christianity and how it came to shape the hearts and minds of Western peoples are a vital episode of the history of freedom that has been very much interesting me since my liberty project began. Hopefully, I will be able to paint a somewhat vivid picture of the process when I next write the report.

14 [14] Proverbs 1:7

15 [15] Psalms 118:8

every word that comes from the mouth of God❖, 16 [16] and "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven❖.17 [17] And, "We love because he first loved us.❖18 [18] All these were more than a great comfort to me, who'd been wondering for years how the fate of truth and love and righteousness would be. From them, I sensed the source of comfort. It is the will of a loving God. It's him who decides the fate of truth and love and righteousness that I hold dearest and everything else. With this affirmation and assurance, I came to remind myself that I shall be as humble as possible when meeting anything I did not like or understand.19 [19] Either personally or publicly, pride or conceitedness seems always to have constituted the biggest obstacle to liberty. As Jesus after resurrection answered the apostles who asked if he was at that time to restore the kingdom of Israel , "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.❖20 [20] Then, what is for me to know? As Jesus told a Pharisee expert in the law who asked which the greatest commandment was in the Law, "❖Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ❖Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.❖21 [21] Personally, I found no reason not to heed this advice. Publicly, I found it just the foundation where a truly free society could be built upon.

After years of searching that I later believed stemmed from the drawing by our Creator, the moment of truth came on December 16th last year when my fianc❖e and I were baptized along with more than fifty other brothers and sisters at the house church I mentioned earlier. That's three months after Daniel helped me find the church during his short visit to Beijing . I'd never been to churches other than government-sanctioned ones before then, chiefly because I had never thought house churches would necessarily be different from government-sanctioned ones and therefore I had never intentionally looked for them, and partly because house churches were underground and no one had ever invited me to these churches prior to Daniel's Beijing visit. As we had already heard of international media reports about the Chinese government's harassment of house churches across China , we were prepared for anything that might happen ahead. But

16 [16] Matthew 4:4

17 [17] Matthew 5:44-45

18 [18] 1 John 4:19

19 [19] "Obedience unlocks understanding.❖ in Rick Warren, *The Purpose-driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For*, (Zondervan, 2002), 72. Also see Professor Orlando Patterson's *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, (BasicBooks, 1991), especially Part Four "Christianity and the Institutionalization of Freedom❖.

20 [20] Acts 1:6-7

21 [21] Matthew 22:34-40

we went there almost every Sunday morning without meeting any harassment except late last year when the church was prevented by the authorities from holding its Christmas service at a planned university auditorium. The church has several fixed worship places in Beijing . The one we go to is a rented downtown office building room where two Sunday services usually draw two hundred worshippers at least, mainly young people especially college students. It's on the office building's 11th floor while the 8th floor also has a worship place with smaller size and older worshippers. The most crucial and direct reason why my fiancée and I decided to get baptized at this church is that we just felt at home with the church including its pastors, preachers, choir and congregation. In fact back in late 2004, my fiancée and I had begun attending a baptismal class at a government-sanctioned Catholic church in Beijing . It came after we had met at the church a devout and kind couple in their sixties who were poor senior citizens themselves but adopted an abandoned baby girl. Nevertheless, we dropped the class halfway for we did not think we had already found the permanent home we belonged to. For us, the government-sanctioned church remained distant from God. And perhaps more important, we ourselves remained distant from God too. I just felt that I had already been part of the world of atheism and agnosticism and materialism and nihilism despite my unwillingness to get involved. It was shown not only by my experience with state-authorized churches. When I was completing my five-year undergraduate study in International Journalism at Beijing Broadcast Institute now Communication University of China, I almost had no other choice but to work at state-controlled media. I once inquired about the possibility of working for Young Men's Christian Association of Beijing, which also has been government-controlled since the Communist's takeover of power in 1949. But I received no reply from them for reasons I still do not know, perhaps that's because I was not a Christian. I worked at China Central Television for six years altogether. Yet long before my resignation in October 2005, I had already quit my job once for a while. That came only a little more than a year after I joined CCTV. However, I returned after finding no other job that could fit in with my major of International Journalism and my quest for liberty. Since then, I tried to focus my attention on improving the English news writing and the further understanding of international political affairs instead of looking for other jobs and the quest for freedom. To some degree, I was not that restless for about three years, in some sense because from 2001 to 2003 there was somewhat relaxed environment for news reporting especially when it comes to international affairs. Yet after all, as Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* shows, restless is our heart until it comes to rest in God.²² [22] That's why I quit again in October 2005, once and for all this time, for embarking upon my liberty project. To me, it constitutes my personal Exodus, to borrow an expression from Voegelin, "from bondage under Pharaoh to freedom under God."²³ [23] No doubt there's a big loss of income and I was under pressure from a variety of sides including I myself, yet one immediate big reward is that I got to know a number of people in China who had already been on the road to the Promised Land. So I became surer than ever that it was not simply someone's particular interest, nor a personal Exodus alone. Among them were the leaders of the church where my fiancée and I got baptized. One was the church's chief pastor, Jin Tianming. Pastor Tianming was a graduate from Tsinghua University , a leading

22 [22] *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Book 1, Chapter 1, translated and edited by Albert C. Outler, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/conf.pdf>

23 [23] Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 112.

institution of higher learning in the Chinese mainland. When graduated in 1991, two years after the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement crackdown, unlike most of his schoolmates, Jin did not go to work nor pursue graduate study at home or abroad. Newly baptized, he and his future wife served at a house church. Later, Jin became a leader of Beijing 's several house churches, which have gradually merged into the current one in recent years. It is perhaps one of the biggest house churches in the Chinese capital. I once asked Pastor Tianming how he had managed not only to survive economic and political and psychological pressure over the past years but also to make the church grow into such a size. "With the spirit of faith, ❶ was his brief answer. He later elaborated it during a sermon earlier this year with Paul's second epistle to the church in Corinth: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ❷ It is written: ❸ I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. ❹ so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. ❺ 24 [24]

Here, I won't go into the detail about what specific difficulties Pastor Tianming and his ministry managed to overcome. That may be part of what I'm beginning to explore in the next step of my liberty project concerning how the faith in God as the Lord can be cultivated in today's world.²⁵ [25] For now, what I would like to highlight is this. Pastor Tianming is never alone. His church is continuing to grow despite many difficulties. And it is only one of perhaps hundreds of house

24 [24] 2 Corinthians 4:8-18

25 [25] How to build a free and responsible society is a topic that has begun attracting ever more public attention in China . A number of serious articles and books in this regard have been published. Some of them highlight the role of classical philosophy and biblical faith in the making of the American and the wider Western culture. For now, few concerns the church. From the social point of view, it looks house churches and other non-government-sanctioned faith-based organizations including orphanages in China are gradually becoming genuinely robust social institutions, which I believe will make biblical worldview known to the ever broader society and provide an important incubator for civic consciousness, civic engagement, civic norms and skills and civic recruitment especially among the country's younger generation. But there seems a long way ahead. Among other things, the legality of house churches and other non-government-sanctioned faith-based organizations is an important issue. Currently, despite continued reports of arrests and harassment, the government acquiesces in the growth of many urban house churches. But it always turns down their registration requests. However in the end, a far more crucial issue may turn out to be how the church does God's will in any social circumstances.

churches and non-government-sanctioned faith-based organizations in Beijing . Across China , the spirit of faith that descended from Abraham to Moses to Paul to Augustine to American founders to Robert Morrison²⁶ [26] might have been spreading far beyond what we could imagine. After centuries of vicissitudes and setbacks, in China , again to borrow from Voegelin a description of Egypt in the wake of the Amarna Revolution, "Man, in his desire for a new freedom, seemed on the verge of opening his soul toward a transcendent God²⁷ [27]

Yet how long will China eventually "break the bonds of Pharaonic order²⁸ to become "a new community under God²⁹? ²⁸ [28] This is perhaps not for me to know. Whenever, the faith in God as the Lord is for me the beginning of freedom. "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.²⁹ [29] "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord³⁰! ³⁰ [30] I couldn't agree more. For as Zechariah writes, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: ³¹ Return to me, and I will return to you.' ³¹ [31] I sincerely believe so.

²⁶ [26] Exactly 200 years ago this month, Robert Morrison arrived in Canton (Guangzhou), becoming the first Protestant missionary in China . Morrison also made history by producing and publishing the first ever Chinese translation of the Holy Bible, the first ever English-Chinese dictionary, the first ever Chinese-language magazine, and establishing the first ever modern school in Chinese history. The most immediate source about Morrison may be [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Morrison_\(missionary\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Morrison_(missionary))

²⁷ [27] Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 111.

²⁸ [28] Ibid.

²⁹ [29] Luke 11:28

³⁰ [30] Psalm 33:12

³¹ [31] Zechariah 1:3